

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 3, 2025

Richard S. Danforth
Chief Executive Officer
Genasys, Inc.
16262 West Bernardo Drive
San Diego, CA 92127

Dear Mr. Danforth,

As Members of Congress representing Los Angeles County, we write regarding erroneous emergency alerts issued during the recent deadly wildfires. In life-safety emergencies, appropriately timed, targeted, and clear emergency alert messages can mean the difference between life and death. However, unclear messages sent to the wrong locations, multiple times and after the emergency has passed, can lead to alerting fatigue and erosion of public trust. In this time of intense grief, loss, and dislocation, we are working to learn all of the lessons of the past weeks, and to swiftly implement reforms to ensure they never happen again.

On Thursday, January 9, 2025, at around 4:00 p.m., nearly ten million inhabitants of Los Angeles County incorrectly received the following alert, "Emergency Alert NEW: This is an emergency message from the Los Angeles County Fire Department. An EVACUATION WARNING has been issued for your area. Remain vigilant of any threats and be ready to evacuate. Gather loved ones, pets, and supplies. Continue to monitor local news, weather, and the webpage alertla.org for more information."¹

The evacuation warning was only intended for the individuals near Calabasas, Agoura Hills, and those within the West Hills community in the western part of the San Fernando Valley, which were under threat from the Kenneth Fire. However, the alert went to cell phones across the entirety of Los Angeles County.²

Although a correction was issued approximately twenty minutes later, noting the error in the initial message and clarifying the evacuation warning was meant only to apply to the Kenneth Fire evacuation area, millions were left in fear and uncertainty for the duration of this period.³

Due to the incorrect warning, millions who were never under any wildfire danger were unnecessarily alarmed and confused, causing distress in a dangerous time of out-of-control wildfires. This has serious implications for public safety and well-being at a time of intense distress for our community. Further, the incident raises a serious risk that future alerts could be ignored or downplayed by more recipients, placing lives at risk.

The alert was dispatched by wireless carriers to cell phones as a Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA), utilizing FEMA's Integrated Public Alert & Warning System (IPAWS).⁴ Following Hurricane Katrina, the Department of Homeland Security created IPAWS to create an "effective, reliable, integrated, flexible, and comprehensive

¹ CNN. (2025, January 16). *Evacuation warnings, vulnerabilities highlighted in LA fires*. CNN. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/16/us/evacuation-warnings-vulnerabilities-la-fires/index.html>

² Los Angeles County. (n.d.). *Incident report for LA County*. Retrieved from <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/CALACOUNTY/bulletins/3cba593?reqfrom=share>

³ Serna, J. (2025, January 9). *Emergency alert text messages sent during Los Angeles fire*. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-01-09/emergency-alert-text-message-los-angeles-fire>

⁴ Rolling Stone. (2025, January 9). *Los Angeles' false fire alert: What happened?* Rolling Stone. Retrieved from <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/los-angeles-false-fire-alert-what-happened-1235234626/>

communications system to alert and warn" the public.⁵ Los Angeles City, Los Angeles County, and LAX are approved Alerting Authorities who can issue critical public alerts and warnings in their jurisdictions.⁶

On January 10, 2025, The Los Angeles County Joint Information Center announced:

Our preliminary investigation indicates that an accurate, correctly-targeted alert went out from LA County's Emergency Operations Center at around 4 p.m. on Thursday, January 9. However, after it left the EOC, the alert was erroneously sent out to nearly 10 million residents across the County. Genasys, a vendor that operates the software for the County's emergency alert messaging, is part of our review and is conducting testing to determine how the original notification was sent far outside the intended geographic area. The company said Friday it has added safeguards to its software.⁷

In a tweet, Genasys stated, "While we have been unable to replicate this issue, we have added additional safeguards into the software intended to ensure this cannot happen within our platform."⁸ In an emailed statement, Genasys reported, "The message was promptly cancelled, with a retraction issued within three minutes. The issue was traced to the version 2 or "/v2" user interface of Genasys ALERT/GEM."⁹

Congress has a clear oversight role of the integrated public alert warning system, and must consider whether additional statutory requirements, guidance, or regulations are needed to prevent false alarms from confusing the public in emergency situations. This episode raises serious questions regarding the use of technology for targeting and issuing alerts; and the human-level training, processes, and safeguards while sending these critical life-safety emergency messages.

In 2006, Congress passed The WARN Act to improve the country's emergency alerting system by extending alerting to wireless devices.¹⁰ In 2016, Congress codified requirements for IPAWS to be adaptive to people's geographic locations and improvements to the system's resiliency and security.¹¹ And following the 2018 false missile alert in Hawaii, Congress required FEMA to develop minimum standards for State, Tribal, and local governments that use the system.^{12 13}

Members of Congress and our constituents are working to understand the precise failures which allowed messages to go out erroneously.

To conduct the necessary congressional oversight to improve emergency alerts, we request your response to the following questions no later than April 1, 2025:

1. Please provide context and information regarding how Genasys, Inc. is utilized by Los Angeles County to provide protecting communications tools including the EVAC and ALERT systems.

⁵ Congressional Research Service, "The Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS): Primer and Issues for Congress"

⁶ Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). (n.d.). *Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS): Alerting authorities*. Retrieved from <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/integrated-public-alert-warning-system/public-safety-officials/alerting-authorities/agencies-organizations>

⁷ Los Angeles County. (n.d.). *Update on LA County emergency response*. Retrieved from <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/CALACOUNTY/bulletins/3cbddc0?reqfrom=share>

⁸ Genasys Inc. (n.d.). *Status update tweet*. X (formerly Twitter). Retrieved from <https://x.com/GenasysInc/status/1877871892465344813>

⁹ Genasys. (n.d.). *V2 Customer Email: Genasys Update – LA County Incident*.

¹⁰ U.S. Congress. (2006). *Security and Accountability For Every Port Act (SAFE Port Act)*. Public Law 109-347.

¹¹ U.S. Congress. (2016). *Integrated Public Alert and Warning System Modernization Act*. Public Law 114-143.

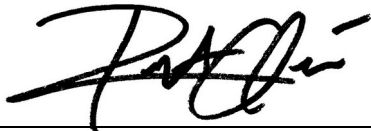
¹² U.S. Congress. (2019). *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, Sec. 1756*. Public Law 116-92.

¹³ Congressional Research Service. (n.d.). *The Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS): Primer and issues for Congress*.

2. Please describe the actions taken by both Los Angeles County and Genasys, Inc., and any interactions between the County and the company, over the days following the false alarms that could assist us in our oversight of best practices for emergency communications tools.
3. Please provide a list of all contracts with State, Tribal, or local governments to provide protective communications tools.
4. Please describe the proper operating procedures to be followed by Los Angeles County for utilizing both Genasys' EVAC software for targeting evacuation areas, and Genasys' ALERT software for mass notification. What roles are played by Office of Emergency Management personnel and what roles are played by Genasys' software?
5. What is the status of your investigation into the cause of the alert message being sent beyond its intended targeting?
6. Specifically describe what issues were presented by the user interface of Genasys ALERT/GEM, and how Genasys has addressed these issues.
7. Are there any levels of secondary review, two-person authentication, or checklists with respect to the targeting and distribution of WEA messages in Genasys' ALERT system?
8. What training is provided by Genasys for the staff of public agency purchasers of Genasys software for the EVAC and ALERT systems?

Thank you for your timely response to these Congressional oversight questions.

Sincerely,



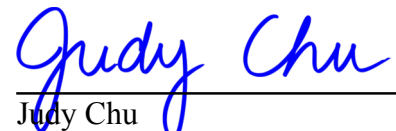
Robert Garcia
Member of Congress



Nanette Diaz Barragan
Member of Congress



Sydney Kamlager-Dove
Member of Congress



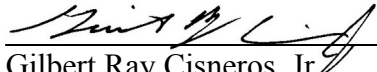
Judy Chu
Member of Congress



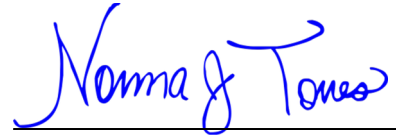
Maxine Waters
Member of Congress



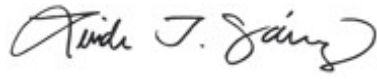
Laura Friedman
Member of Congress



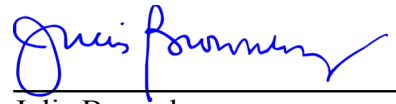
Gilbert Ray Cisneros, Jr.
Member of Congress




Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress



Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress



Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



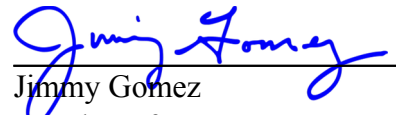
Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress



Luz M. Rivas
Member of Congress



Derek Tran
Member of Congress



Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress